In Norway, one of the best examples for examining cultural narratives of murder is what is known as the Lensmannsmordersaken, i.e., ‘the case of the county police officers murder’. After summarising the key events of this sensational 1926 case, this article will consider its presentation in the Norwegian press, the impact of contemporary debates around the death penalty, the influence of scientific understandings of criminality, and the case’s subsequent reimagining in literature and film. This article shows how inter-war criminalistic fantasies reflected a broad variety of fears, notably those related to ethnic otherness and anxieties related to Norway’s then recent achievement of full political independence. A literary version of the case from the 1930s—one of Norway’s first ‘true-crime’ novels—is also considered, as is a post-war feature film based on the murder that was banned (for privacy reasons) in 1952 and not released again until 2007.

**KEYWORDS**  
crime; Norway; press; stereotypes; homicide; policing

We all create images of things we fear or glorify.1

While a fascination with killers is widespread across time and cultures, media images and narratives of murder and murderers—our fashions in monsters—vary. In Norway, one of the best examples for examining cultural narratives of murder is what is known as the Lensmannsmordersaken, i.e., ‘the case of the county police officers murder’.2 Though the killings occurred in the mid-1920s, their repercussions were long-lasting, and the stories that developed around them expressed stereotypes of the kind of person thought to be morally alien in what was then the recently independent kingdom of Norway. In media and public discourse, the depictions of the killers metamorphosed from the Dangerous Gypsy, the Traveller or the Jew to the Foreign Colonizer threatening Norwegian nationhood and independence. Their representations contained elements of an international shift in understandings of murder as well as specific inter-war Norwegian anxieties regarding re-colonisation, having emerged in a society still coming to terms with its independence and the impact of rapid industrialisation and modernisation. Examining the Lensmannsmordersaken contributes to understanding how Norwegian crime narratives fit into (and differed from) broader trends apparent elsewhere. Daniel Siemens, for example, has emphasised how inter-war crime reporting in Berlin, Paris and Chicago reflected anxieties about ‘modernity’, fears of chaos, and a general ‘feeling of insecurity’ after the Great War.3 In these urbanising mass-societies, press coverage of a Sensationsprozess (sensational trial) allowed social identities and values to be evaluated, confirmed or revised.4 Emblematic of a common confrontation with modernity, images of criminals and
the justice system also shaped specific constellations of values and norms that Siemens calls ‘local moral orders’. Norwegian reactions to the Lensmannsmordersaken confirm such overall patterns, and they are particularly interesting not only because the case was discussed over several decades and treated in various kinds of media but also as it occurred in a different context than metropolitan settings upon which much recent crime and media research has focused. After summarising the key events of the case, this article will consider its presentation in the Norwegian press, the impact of contemporary debates around the death penalty, the influence of scientific understandings of criminality, and the case’s subsequent reimagining in literature and film.

**Lensmannsmordersaken: The Case of the County Police Officers Murder**

In August 1926, two county police officers—John Solumsmoen and Oluf Aalde—were found shot and stabbed to death in the forest outside of Ringerike, a county in western Norway (Figure 1). The discovery led to the largest manhunt in the nation’s history, which lasted for three months, and an unprecedented media frenzy. Some 2000 people attended the funeral service for the victims, and it has been estimated that such a large number of people had not been gathered at Ringerike since kings were crowned there in the Middle Ages. The case also led to a widespread moral panic, and several people were inaccurately named in the newspapers as being the murderers. The murderers were ultimately revealed to have been two men: one Norwegian, Henning

![A scene from the film Two Suspicious Persons. Photo: The National Library of Norway](image)
Sigurd Madsen (1907–1986), the other Swedish, Anton Emanuel Oscar Svensson (1891–1926). Svensson committed suicide just prior to capture; Madsen surrendered and was arrested. He later admitted to having committed both murders and, in 1927, was sentenced to life imprisonment (which meant 16 years in prison). In 1949 a feature film was made about this case. By that time, Madsen had been released from prison: he had changed his name, married, and—according to trial transcripts—appeared completely rehabilitated. He took the film-makers to court, arguing that the film violated his right to privacy. The film was banned in 1952 by the Supreme Court and remained so for 55 years: it was finally released on 2 February 2007.

The early 1950s court case is a cause célèbre in Norwegian legal history, since the Supreme Court ruled that there was an unwritten principle of an individual right to privacy in the Norwegian Constitution. This ruling became increasingly relevant within jurisprudence, such as in the work of the Norwegian law professor Jon Bing,7 and led Norway to develop some of the strictest individual privacy laws worldwide. However, Bing and other lawyers have focused neither on the original murder from 1926 nor the subsequent prosecution from 1927 but rather solely on the Supreme Court judgement of 1952. Although the strictly legal principles raised in the case are known to every lawyer in Norway, the Lensmannsmordersaken has thus far been ignored by criminologists and historians: outside legal circles, the literature on the case has essentially been limited to the 1933 book To mistenkelige personer (Two Suspicious Persons), written by the journalist Gunnar Larsen, which served as the basis of 1949 film. It has been described as one of the first Norwegian true-crime novels.8 The Lensmannsmordersaken is thus not only interesting as an important issue in the history of the Norwegian Supreme Court: it has a singular position in the cultural and media history of Norwegian crime and justice and opens perspectives on aspects of the media’s presentations of crime over three decades.

The Lensmannsmordersaken, the Police and the Media

The early police statements strongly influenced the killers’ subsequent depictions (Figure 2). Police throughout Norway received alert on 3 September 1926 from the Oppdagelsespoliti, warning them, in the matter of the county police officers’ murder, to be on the lookout for Sigurd Madsen.9 He was supposed to be in his mid-twenties, ‘of medium size’ and ‘probably somewhat under average height’. He was further described as:

Fairly thin, dark and rather thick hair combed back from his forehead, no beard, thin face, somewhat hooked nose, dark blue eyes, dark small eyebrows, fairly broad mouth with thick lips and regular long and narrow teeth both above and below, not especially white. Face quite ordinary but some parts marked with dark skin colour and dark growth of beard, small and slender hands without scratches, wounds or tattoos, speaks Norwegian.

The initial focus on Sigurd Madsen shifted radically when the Swede Anton Emanuel Oscar Svensson (also known as Harald Eklov, Østalinas Pojk and August Wilhelm Johansson) became a suspect. Svensson was described in a later alert by the Chief of the Oppdagelsespoliti as:

tall, heavily built, blue eyes, probably without a beard, or maybe a small blond moustache, oval face, straight nose, tattoo on his right forearm: two birds in a horseshoe,
FIGURE 2
Wanted poster of Anton Emanuel Oscar Svensson, offering 3000 NOK reward
a female figure and flowers, etc. And on his left forearm: two female figures in a breast image. He is a crude and brutal criminal, has partly operated extensively as a burglar in Sweden where he has been living in the woods, creeping out of the forest at night and committing robberies.

The Oppdagelsepolitiet gave additional information in a bulletin dated 27 September 1926: ‘Furthermore one should be aware of the fact that Svensson is a gypsy and that he possibly may try to connect with Travellers so that he can hide in for example gypsy hideaways. These should therefore be searched’. These are only a few of the official alerts police officers received during the summer and autumn of 1926. The recurrent characteristics emphasised in descriptions of the two wanted men add up to a picture of the perception of what and who a murderer was. One finds the same descriptions again and again in the later discourse about the county police murderers, especially in the presentations of the Swede with the many aliases.

For example, on 24 August 1926, the newspaper Dagbladet (The Daily News) used the police reports to write about an alleged association with gypsies: ‘The terrible way Solumsmaen was killed, stabbed twice in his throat’, the paper wrote, ‘indicates that this perpetrator could possibly be a gypsy or a Finn—it is most unusual that Norwegian criminals defend themselves in this way’. The matter was given added poignancy by the fact that only one police officer had hitherto been killed in the line of duty in Norway in the twentieth century (in 1906).10 The rareness with which Norwegian police were killed and the brutality of the crime, the newspaper argued, made a Norwegian perpetrator unthinkable.

At the time of the murders, Norway had been an independent nation for only about 20 years. The early twentieth century had not only seen Norway gain its national sovereignty from Sweden, but also a whirlwind of social and demographic changes. Between 1906 and 1916 Norwegian industry grew by 83%. A spurt of economic growth after the Great War quickly collapsed, and the chronic economic depression that would later plague other nations had already hit Norway by 1920: the ‘roaring twenties’ saw not only widespread poverty and hunger, intense social and political conflicts, a strong urban–rural divide, and substantial class conflict. Moreover, memories of the Norwegian–Swedish ‘Unionsstriden’—a debate over whether Norway should become sovereign and its subsequent relationship with Sweden that lasted for much of the nineteenth century, culminating in the 1890s and 1900s—were still part of public discourse. Legislation was in effect discriminating against various minority groups, particularly Jews, Roma and Travellers. Jews had been forbidden to enter Norwegian territory until 1851; in 1920 there were approximately 1400 Jews residing in Norway, most of whom had emigrated from Eastern Europe at the beginning of the twentieth century. The 1920s saw a ban in Norway against kosher slaughter and the publication of anti-Semitic propaganda.11

Various moral entrepreneurs, especially from Protestant and Evangelical circles, were instrumental in creating societies dedicated to combating the way of life of the Roma and Travellers. Their children were taken away and placed in special institutions for re-education as proper Norwegian citizens. Other forcible instruments of assimilation were the sterilisation of women, prohibitions against owning horses and the establishment of worker colonies. Though some of these measures can be traced back to the last decades of the nineteenth century, the 1920s saw the intensification of state persecution of the Roma and the Travellers through amendments specifically directed towards ‘Gypsies’ in
the Vagrancy Act of 1923, which forced many Travellers to leave Norway. Stereotypes of these groups can be found not only in crime reports but also in crime fiction, which started to thrive in Norway from the 1900s. Even if not always portrayed as criminal, they were clearly cast as diverging from what was considered genuinely Norwegian. By identifying particular criminal ‘others’ based on cultural, ethnic or religious factors, the inter-war Norwegian press participated in a general European phenomenon in the early twentieth century, even if the specific assemblage of fears is distinct.

In the interwar period, such fears were articulated in the context of an economic hardship that was also affecting the press market. Although the first Norwegian newspapers can be traced back to the mid-eighteenth century, the number of titles did not greatly increase until the later nineteenth century; however, by the time of the Great War (in which Norway remained neutral), every registered household in Norway subscribed to at least one newspaper. The financial downturn of the 1920s meant a stagnation in what had been a half-century boom in the newspaper industry. Several newspapers closed; those that remained competed intensely for the attention of the reading public. This rivalry was also apparent in other European countries, as was the effort to attract readers through sensationalism. Indeed, the newspapers appeared to compete in giving the most grotesque and shocking presentations of the Lensmannsmordersaken.

Bing has rightly observed that the journalistic depictions of the case were horrendous and imaginative. One example are descriptions of how the police, volunteers and journalists found the Swede’s body after his suicide. In the Aftenposten (The Evening Post) from 23 October 1926, one could read that:

There, the county police officer killer lay. His head was bent over his left wrist. The right arm was lying limp and half open. The revolver had fallen from his hand. Blood and brain mass dripped from the wound in his forehead where the bullet had entered. His left eye was closed and the right eye was wide open. He was still breathing when we went close to him and his heart was still beating, though he soon drew his last breath.

Not only were these graphic details described, but they were also accompanied by pictures of the dead Swede. Journalists did not hesitate to publicise their own journalistic ‘autopsies’. On 25 October 1926, Aftenposten posted the following question on its front page: ‘Why did the Swede Svensson not shoot at his pursuers?’ In answering its own question, the paper suggested there were ‘pretty obvious reasons’ and ‘natural causes’ for the murderer not having ‘sold his life at a higher cost’: ‘It may be probable that the reason that he was not able to shoot at the pursuers was simply because his badly wounded right hand was unusable. Shrapnel had penetrated the right hand and quickly caused swelling and rigidity’. Giving all the gruesome details, the journalist continues to describe this hand—now twice its normal size—and the corpse’s overall condition. The possibility that the Swede may not have wanted to shoot at his Norwegian pursuers was not raised: with no doubt about his bad intentions, his actions were explained purely as a failure of ability rather than of will.

Romancing Capital Punishment

The media frenzy not only featured many similar descriptions and speculations but also raised policy issues, such as whether Norway should reinstate the death penalty,
abolished in peacetime in 1905. Days after Svensson’s suicide, on 27 October 1926, the newspaper *Tidens Tegn* (*The Future Signs*) raised this issue in one of the more articulate articles published on the case. A journalist wrote that Svensson had not killed himself out of regret but rather ‘in spite of it’, refusing to ‘surrender’ and ‘give up the freedom of the woods or his life of sin’. However, the article continued:

> if there is any value in dying like a man—and there must be some worth in risking one’s life—he can then not be condemned or judged as a common and lethargic recidivist. In our criminal history and grey miserable existence, Svensson’s choice was a darker—and why not say what we all feel—a more gripping one. We, the good citizens, who had to pursue him were in our right to do so yet will stop for a moment with a strange feeling in our hearts confronted by a fallen enemy.

The article observed that the nineteenth century had ‘invented humanitarianism’ and ‘abolished the death penalty’, noting that Norway (‘which rarely lets an opportunity of reform pass by’) had been in the forefront of European abolitionism. However, ‘In recent years, where also the idyll here in our home has given way to conditions where hardcore crimes are frequent, one has often asked oneself whether there was any reason to keep these miscreant criminals alive’. This not only questions the efficacy of humane policies towards allegedly incorrigible criminals but also suggests a kind of horrendous splendour and magnificent, epic drama in Svensson’s act.

This depiction in *Tidens Tegn* was hardly unique. For example, one of the headlines in the newspaper *Indre Smaalenenes Avis* (*Indre Smaalenenes Local News*, 23 October 1926) poetically proclaimed: ‘The case of the murders of the district police officers cometh at last to its end’. The article from *Tidens Tegn* (27 October 1926) concluded, more than alluding to the Talion Law of the Old Testament, that, ‘It is face-to-face with death that life often unfolds itself in its greatest beauty’.

> All that daily makes people seem small and insignificant falls away and there they are, simply naked. Death showed us the county police officer murderer as something more than a criminal. Suddenly we saw a human being. And maybe that was something the elders were thinking when they demanded a life for a life.

Besides raising the question of whether or not the death penalty was the only solution when dealing with vile murderers—whether modern humanitarian criminal policies denied them from being part of the community—one also finds the notion that suicide and murder can possess a moral and aesthetic beauty. This notion could be found in the Romantic period, with Thomas De Quincey’s 1827 semi-satirical essay *On Murder Considered as one of the Fine Arts* (a critique of the views of Immanuel Kant and others regarding aesthetics) being especially well known. His point was that by equalising the beautiful, the moral and the aesthetic, one is in danger of undermining and distorting the ethically correct. In light of the development of phrenology and, then, criminal anthropology, many would agree. There is none of De Quincey’s lightly ironic distance in *Tidens Tegn*. There, the commentary more straightforwardly romanticises the grandeur of the Swede’s suicide and reflects upon whether the death penalty might indeed be more appropriate to—as more in the spirit of—the principles of egalitarian liberalism.
**The Lensmannsmordersaken and the New Criminal Science**

In covering the case, journalists found ever more imaginative angles. For instance, there was a lengthy interview in *Dagbladet* (25 October 1926) with the bloodhound ‘Mira II’, a dog who achieved a curious fame after it was revealed that she had been the first to catch the scent of the Swede on the run (Figure 3). The journalist asks: ‘How old are you?’ Mira II ‘answers’: ‘Seven years old’. The journalist asks: ‘Are you Norwegian?’ Mira II answers: ‘Yes. I was born and bred in Norway and have Norwegian parents. I am the first police dog in Norway who has been trained for this’. The interviewer is told that Mira II has helped to capture at least 15–20 dangerous criminals. The interview ends with an appeal from Mira II for more resources for training sniffer dogs and a request that more dogs should be sent to Germany on seminars.

Apart from feature stories like this, the media was focused on the Swede, Svensson, in contrast to his Norwegian companion, Madsen. Madsen is often absent from the articles, drawings and photos that accompanied press coverage of the case, and Svensson was seen as the more dangerous of the two. The prosecutors faced the problem of how to proceed after the sensational manhunt. What had actually taken place? The only living witness to Solumsmaoen and Aalde’s fate at Ringerike was Madsen, who, after his arrest, gave many contradictory statements. Here, there was an opening for the new criminal ‘experts’ to contribute their knowledge.

**FIGURE 3**  
The cinematic version of the police dog ‘Mira II’, from the film *Two Suspicious Persons*.  
Photo: The National Library of Norway
For the first time in Norwegian history, a fingerprint from the scene of the crime led to an identification. After comparing 12,000 fingerprints, the police linked Svensson to the crime scene. Reportedly, they could also prove that the shots came from the gun that Madsen had when arrested.19 Eventually, Madsen admitted to firing the gun a few times, but he was unable to say whether he had hit Solummoen or Aalde. Madsen's defence lawyer emphasised two things that he wanted the Court of Appeal—and, later in the autumn, the Supreme Court—to consider. First, the young Norwegian's age: at the time of the murders, Madsen was one month shy of 19. Second, he had been very young when he first met Svensson, and, he argued, it had been the Swede who had lured the Norwegian into what became a criminal career. Both the Court of Appeal and the Supreme Court acknowledged in their decisions that the murders had been a result of Madsen's dependency on Svensson; nonetheless, they found insufficient mitigating circumstances to avoid sentencing the Norwegian to lifetime imprisonment, or, effectively, 16 years' imprisonment.20

In 1933, the year that Gunnar Larsen's book appeared, Christian Christensen wrote that Svensson's mentality and 'peculiar relationship' with a 'young and weak boy' who was 'totally subjected to his power' explained how the Swede had incited Madsen to commit the crimes. He dramatically portrayed the encounter in the woods that led to the officers' deaths.

They [the officers] arrive at their camp and ask: 'Sitting here eating, guys?' No answer. The county police officers ask who they are and Svensson replies crossly: 'We are who we are'. The county police officers now tell them that they are police officers and that they demand a serious reply to their questions. Svensson gets up and says: 'And you come here to talk to us about this in the middle of the wood …'. In the reply lies the whole key to Svensson's mental state. The man from the woods, the outlaw, the asocial, the predator who rises against civilized public servants who dare intrude with their law paragraphs in 'the forest green'.21

Gunnar Larsen's book contains further depictions of the Swede as an untamed predator as well as the alleged exchange of words prior to the murder. The 'peculiar relationship' between the Norwegian (referred to as 'the Boy' in the book) and the Swede ('the Man') is at the heart of Larsen's true-crime novel. As in the presentations in the Court of Appeal and in the Supreme Court, the book does not clearly state who the culprit was: in that sense Larsen deemed them both guilty; however, his description also suggests which one of them is the real murderer. Unlike most of the media coverage, Larsen was not particularly interested in the Swede: it was the Norwegian who captured his attention. He wished to interview Madsen in prison, but he declined. If anyone were to write a book about him, he commented, it would be himself.

Larsen continued with his project despite Madsen's objections and attempt to prevent the book's publication. Larsen's presentation of the 'boy's' psyche, further explores the factors emphasised by the defence in the trial: Madsen's age and his alleged dependency on the Swede. It seems that, for Larsen, the young man's main crime was not realising the gravity of the situation and the severity of the acts that were committed. Larsen depicts the boy finding it exciting and enjoyable to be in the woods with the Swede, seeing it as something like playing Cowboys and Indians: he fails to realise for some time that the news reports everyone is reading concern him and the Swede. For the
boy, the stories are merely read as thriller articles. As the gravity of the situation slowly dawns on him, his trust in the Swede gradually turns into fear, which is the only thing that prevents him from attempting to escape from this ‘prison (Figure 4).’ 22 Key elements in the portrayal of the ‘County Police Murderers’ in the media from the autumn of 1926, in newspaper coverage of the trial in 1927 and in Gunnar Larsen’s 1933 book—the innocence of the Norwegian and the Swede as the evil and despicable murderer—are even more apparent in the film version of the case produced some 15 years after the novel’s publication.

Two Suspicious Persons: A Fable of Escape

Tancred Ibsen wrote himself into Norwegian film history with the film version of To mistenkelige personer (or, as the full title reads, To mistenkelige personer—en fabel om flukt [Two suspicious persons: a fable of escape]), though his accomplishment came in a manner probably contrary to what he had hoped for. 23 The film’s reputation and impact on Norwegian media history is mainly due to its status as a work of art that remained almost completely unseen for more than half a century. Even if the film had been allowed to be shown publicly as intended by its producers, it would hardly be seen as an exciting ‘action film’; however, audiences in the early 1950s may have reacted differently. Even by today’s cinematic standards, the film is not without interest and has an elegant dramaturgical structure.
Like Gunnar Larsen, Ibsen uses a retrospective technique at the beginning. Between long scenes with the two killers attempting to escape through the woods with the police, home guard and air force on their trail, the viewer sees glimpses of the past and the present. These glimpses are not meant to drive forward the story itself— with which contemporary audiences would have been familiar—but are included to illustrate the relationship between ‘the Boy’ (the Norwegian) and ‘the Man’ (the Swede). As in the press presentation of the case in 1926, the Swede once again plays the lead role in the events that lead to the killing. The purpose of the film’s dramaturgy is principally to describe and explain the Swede’s character and his murderous nature. We are presented with numerous motives in the film, which are used to create moral dichotomies and contrasts to shed light on different aspects of the Swede’s personality. The physical depiction of the Norwegian and the Swede are examples of the contrasts used in the film: the Swede as unkempt and has disgusting table manners, as opposed to the Norwegian who is presented as a modest and remorseful young man dressed in Knickerbockers. During the trials of 1927, the defence used the argument that the Norwegian was immature, a point that is supported in the book by Larsen. In the film one understands that he is older than 17; however, he is shown wearing shorts, clothing for which he would have been too old according to contemporary rural masculine ideals.

The film also goes much further than the media, the court’s ruling and the book in suggesting that the Norwegian not only was in some sense innocent because of the Swede’s malign influence but even questions whether or not he actually committed the murders at all. One can also find in Larsen’s book the contrast between the child’s innocence and the murderer, i.e., the Swede. Although psychoanalysis was a relatively new discipline, introduced to Norwegian scholars in the 1930s, it may partly explain the focus on the psychological dynamics between Madsen and Svensson in Larsen’s book and the film: in both cases a key explanation for Madsen’s lack of empathy, deviant behaviour and decision to join the Swede was the incapability of a single mother to properly raise a son without a decent father figure with whom he could to identify. The fact that Larsen, though initially reluctant, was persuaded to consent to the production may have been film’s focus on creating a psychological portrait of its protagonists. His agreement may have been partly based on the hope that the film could provide a visual portrayal of the Swede as the ‘monster’ that Larsen actually thought he was. Second, Larsen opined that the film could have an edifying function: he was adamant that the film aimed to raise awareness and understanding among the respectable public not only about who had murdered the county police officers but also, more generally, about the nature of murderers and the causes of murder.24

However, there is another aspect to the uses made of this interwar case in its post-Second World War cinematic incarnation. The film has few similarities with classic detective stories; instead, it is an allegory, a veritable fable of the fight for maturity, independence and civilisation. Unlike the book, the film has a subtitle: *A Fable of Escape*. But this is meant in more than a personal, individual sense: more than a mere ‘murder story’, the hunt for the murderer can be seen as symbolising the battle for the modernisation of Norway, which had only become an independent nation in 1905 after having been a Swedish colony and subsequently experiencing German occupation between 1940 and 1945. An important aspect of the film which has hitherto been
ignored is that the fable can be seen as a battle between two worlds, with the murderer (in the film a Swede) representing the sort of society away from which Norway was starting to evolve. The film and narrative of these two suspicious persons tell a story of how Norway viewed itself as a nation, with the Swede representing Norwegians’ fear of (again) losing their independence.

**Conclusion**

There were many stories in the *Lensmannsmordersaken*: police alerts, press coverage, Larsen’s novel and Ibsen’s film. As Siemens suggests in his study of Berlin, Paris and Chicago, inter-war crime narratives expressed both commonly held fears about modernity as well as a ‘local moral order’. The shared urban fears built on an earlier epistemological shift in modern western discourse identified by Karen Halttunen. Halttunen uses the example of American culture to argue that the ‘dominant narrative’ in popular responses to murder ‘underwent a major transformation in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century’. In the earlier sacred narrative the focus had been on the condemned killer’s soul: the final drama was the sinner’s spiritual salvation and redemption. Later, the murderer changed from a common sinner to a moral monster, creating an impassable gulf between the murderer—now a moral alien—and normal citizens. Discourses of murder and mental illness responded to society’s need to come to terms with the ‘evil’ demonstrated by the apparent differences between the mentally ill or criminals—now cast in the role of modernity’s *Doppelgänger*—and people inhabiting normal society: the otherness of the former and the normalcy of the latter was thus confirmed. This ‘gulf’ came to characterise Western modernity, even if its specific parameters differed from nation to nation. The distancing of the ‘abnormal’ criminal was taken up into the emerging ‘scientific’ disciplines that sought to understand the criminal as a psychological rather than moral problem. These (often technical) ‘scientific’ narratives were translated back into the public sphere by the ‘inter-discourses’ offered by the press and other media.

All of these elements are apparent in the case of the *Lensmannsmordersaken*, offering insight into what Todd Herzog (writing about Weimar Germany) has called inter-war ‘criminalistic fantasies’. The weaving together of fantasy and criminality in newspaper reports contributed to the modern paranoia of ‘crime’ being everywhere, what Baudrillard might have called an implosion of the real with the hyper-real, yet one that still holds echoes of lived lives. In 1920s, it was possible to find expressions of Norway’s (recently ended) colonial relationship in the depiction of the brutal Swedish murderer Svensson and his psychological dominance over his younger Norwegian companion. Other scientific narratives are apparent, whether the influence of the School of Criminal Anthropology on the Norwegian criminal justice system in the 1920s or of psychoanalytical thinking, common from the 1930s onwards. Racism and anti-Semitism, in both the Norwegian police and press, are apparent: the first police alert, for example, resonates with the stereotype of the eternal Jew, though as Daniel Vyleta has shown in the context of turn-of-the-century Vienna, even clearly ‘racial’ Jewish criminal stereotypes coexisted with those based on attributions of cunning hyper-rationality rather than biological degeneration. The *Lensmannsmordersaken*, too, shows that racialised discourses coexisted with other ways of turning the murderer into a stranger to society.
The tense sociopolitical climate of the 1920s exacerbated the traditional stereotypes by Scandinavians of their neighbours: Svensson was stereotyped in ways common at the time but with a particularly malign content. The sensationalist reporting reflects shifting images and stereotypes of those perceived as morally and otherwise alien to standards of normalcy and 'Norwegian-ness': the image of the murderer functioned as a screen upon which diverse prejudices could be projected.

Legal studies have largely focused on Ibsen’s film and the Supreme Court’s ruling; however, part of the explanation for the film’s banning lies in the earlier history of the case. The focus in legal studies on the Supreme Court’s verdict of 1952 has overshadowed the significance of the Lensmannsmordersaken in interwar criminological and police circles. The head of the Oppdagelsespolitiet, Reidar Sveen, wrote an article about the case for the hundredth issue of Archiv für Kriminologie, also translated into Norwegian, which concludes with description of the case’s impact. Sveen claimed the case was significant not only because of role played by fingerprint identification. It had also led to greater centralisation of the investigation procedures for serious crimes, stricter ‘control of strangers such as vagabonds and Travellers’, and greater press regulation.33 ‘All of these reforms’, Sveen concluded, ‘have been shown to be of great value for the police investigative techniques and strategy’.34 To Sveen’s ‘list’ one may of course add the Supreme Court ruling regarding the constitutional right to privacy. While often hailed as a ruling protecting individual privacy, it is important to keep in mind that it the ruling may have been partly motivated by another typical aspect of the modern culture of control: the desire by criminal justice authorities to reign in the press.

Whether one looks at the police bulletins, press reports, and trial transcripts of the 1920s, the novel from the 1930s, or the film of the 1940s, the Case of the County Police Officers murder seem to present its own sinister ‘Doppelgänger’: it portrays not so much the murder or a murderer as a portrait of what a ‘true’ murderer was believed to be. While giving an insight into the fashionable criminological concepts of a particular time and place, the patterns that emerge exemplify more broadly how western societies seek to define and exorcise their moral aliens. The various Norwegian images and narratives of ‘two suspicious persons’ between the late 1920s and early 1950s can also be retold in the light of the story of a young nation still uncertain of its own identity and prospects for the future.

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Notes

1. Gilman, Difference and Pathology, 15.

2. Lensmann is in Norway a leader of a police district known as lensmannsdistrikt. A lensmann is a public servant.

3. Siemens, Metropole und Verbrechen, 16.

4. Ibid., 20–21.
6. For example, Müller, Auf der Suche; Siemens, Metropole und Verbrechen; Herzog, Crime Stories; Elder, Murder Scenes; Brunelle, Murder in the Metro.
9. Oppdagelsespoltiet is the part of the police force today known as Kripos, the National Criminal Investigation Service (Norway). This department has undergone a number of name changes since it was founded in 1866; however, the unit has always investigated what have been seen as the most serious crimes.
10. Throughout the entire twentieth century only 26 police officers were killed in Norway, many of them in traffic accidents and not necessarily in the course of criminal investigations.
15. Rowbotham, Stevenson, and Pegg, Crime News; Williams, Murder.
16. Bing, “To mistenkelige personer.”
17. The last public execution in Norway was in 1876.
18. De Quincey, Murder.
20. Ibid., 190–93.
22. Larsen, To mistenkelige personer.
23. Tancred Ibsen (1893–1978), the grandson of the playwrights Henrik Ibsen and Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson, was a pioneering film-maker of Norwegian cinema.
25. Siemens, Metropole und Verbrechen.
27. Wiener, Reconstructing the Criminal; Wetzell, Inventing the Criminal.
30. Baudrillard, Simulacra and Simulation.
33. The strained relationship between the police and the press was also a topic covered in the newspapers during the Lensmannsmordersaken. On 15 September 1926, Dagbladet reported that the Director of Prosecutions had arranged a meeting with the press with the aim of improving that relationship.
35. Ystehede, Lov&Data.

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